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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001147

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2008
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EPET](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLICE KILL FOUR DEMONSTRATORS; STRIKE
CONTINUES

REF: (A) ABUJA 1135 (B) ABUJA 1107 (C) ABUJA 1091

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

11. (U) Summary: The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) strike entered its second day with reports of sporadic violence, including four people apparently killed near Abuja. Nevertheless, the general mood is less tense than it was during the strike's first day. Some domestic flights resumed today, and the major oil companies report no interruption in their operations. Efforts to resolve the strike continue, with NLC leaders and the Presidency meeting from the afternoon of June 30 to the early morning of July 1. No resolution to the impasse was achieved, but the Government and NLC did agree to establish a "technical committee" that will draft recommendations to end the crisis. The country remains mostly calm. However, as long as the strike continues, the possibility of altercations between police and strikers exists and political tensions could escalate. End Summary.

Four Strikers Killed and 88 Jailed in Abuja

12. (U) GON officials confirmed to Poloff that police killed four people attempting to block a road in one of Abuja's satellite towns on June 30. Initially, the press reported that police confirmed the deaths then later retracted the statement, claiming to have no information that strikers were shot. NLC officials claimed (and eyewitness accounts tend to corroborate) that live ammunition was used during the encounter in the satellite town. Eighty-eight protesters were arrested in Abuja yesterday. Many labor leaders were detained temporarily.

13. (U) An Embassy police source reported heavy security and military patrols in major cities. Embassy sources in Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Sokoto and throughout the North reported that banks, shops and markets remained closed. Non-unionized private sector industries, however, were operating as usual.

Police Lock Down NLC Headquarters

14. (U) Senior NLC official Salihu Lukman confirmed to Econoff that police sealed off NLC Headquarters in Abuja this morning for several hours. An NLC advisor complained President Obasanjo was trying to intimidate the NLC. By locking down the NLC Headquarters (traditionally a rallying point for strikers) the President hoped to stop labor-led protests, the official stated. NLC senior official Benson Upah also claimed that police fired tear gas and live ammunition at a vehicle carrying Oshiomole this morning.

Crude Still Flowing

15. Members of NUPENG, the blue collar oil workers union, have joined in the strike. A Lagos-based Exxon-Mobil official reports the strike has not disrupted oil production, and exports continue apace. A Shell representative also reported no production disruptions due to the strike. At this time, PENGASSEN, the skilled petroleum worker's union, has not joined the strike but will likely make a decision following a meeting in Abuja today.

Lagos and the South Calm

16. (U) Lagos remained quiet and mostly calm. While most businesses remained closed, some shopping centers were open. Lagos' mainland region, where the bulk of Lagosians live, experienced a second morning of scattered violence, with gangs of young men burning tires and intimidating drivers going to work.

17. (U) There was noticeably increased police presence. There were also reports of police clashing with bands of strike sympathizers at key intersections early Tuesday morning. On Ikoyi and Victoria Islands, the focal point of the financial and services sectors where most diplomatic missions are located, the strike was having virtually no impact other than the closure of some businesses and a welcomed reduction in traffic.

18. (U) Ogun, the President's home state, is reportedly "shut down" today due to the strike. The situation in the South-South also appears quiet. Port Harcourt experienced minor incidents of violence. Most residents stayed home, but some gas stations were operating and drivers were queuing for fuel. Civil servants appeared for work on Tuesday in larger numbers than on Monday. Warri appeared no more tense than usual in recent months, and no specific acts of violence or clashes have been reported.

Air Travel Resumes, but Some Flights Canceled

19. (U) Most domestic airlines claimed they were operating normally on domestic routes Tuesday morning, but passengers reported many canceled flights. Officials of the National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE) and Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (ATSSSAN) reported that their attempts to shut down flight operations had been unsuccessful. Some disruptions were reported, but air traffic controllers, for the most part, elected not to strike. An NLC official reported they were planning to block all the routes leading to the Lagos airport to prevent passenger access. (Comment: Such an action would likely be met with stiff police and security response. End Comment.) On Monday morning, an attempt to chain the gates of the airport was easily overcome by airport security. There was reportedly no shortage of jet-fuel at Nigeria's airports today.

110. (U) The Nigerian Stock Exchange operated normally on Monday, but volumes were low because some dealers were absent. Nonetheless, banking shares in particular remained actively traded, with analysts reporting a generally positive mood overall in the securities market.

Comment

11. (C) On its second day, the strike continues to complicate may normal business activities throughout Nigeria. But the atmosphere is less expectant today than yesterday and it is too early to determine whether the strikers will be able to hold out or if their action has had such an economic impact that it would cause government to want a quick resolution by sharply reducing their price increase. Nevertheless, the proposed technical committee may be a face-saving device for both Labor and the Government wherein a compromise price is reached, allowing each side to claim a victory of sorts. This is precisely how a similar nation-wide strike over a petrol price increase was settled a few years ago. In the end, and no matter how gallant labor fights, a petrol price increase is inevitable. That said, the price increase will, in the short term, result in higher food and transportation costs, stretching the naira even thinner for most Nigerians. End Comment.

JETER